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TELEGRAM

June 16, 2004

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 1989 - UNKNOWN)
TAGS: PREL
Captions: None
Subject: UAE HAS UNFINISHED BUSINESS OVER ITS BORDER WITH SAUDI ARABIA
Ref: None

S E C R E T ABU DHABI 01989

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CXABU:
ACTION: POL
INFO: P/M ECON RSO DCM AMB

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:MMWAHBA
DRAFTED: POL:JFMAYBURY
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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4752
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 001989

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/15/2014
TAGS: PREL SA TC
SUBJECT: UAE HAS UNFINISHED BUSINESS OVER ITS BORDER
WITH SAUDI ARABIA

Ref: 03 Abu Dhabi 4764

Classified by Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba, reasons
1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: Thirty years after signing an agreement with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over their common border, the UAE Government still views three issues as unsettled and needing discussion: exploitation of the Zarrarah/Shaybah oil field; the maritime border between Saudi Arabia and the UAE; and the delimitation of the convergence point of the tri-border area between the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. MFA Under Secretary Abdullah Rashid Al-Nuaimi briefed the Ambassador on the situation during her farewell call at his MFA office on June 14. UAE Deputy Prime

Minister and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Shaykh Hamdan bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (HbZ) had earlier told the Ambassador about an exchange of letters he had had with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, in which the two disagreed over the need to review the 1974 agreement. Abdullah Rashid said he expects the border issue will have to be raised to the level of their two Crown Princes. End Summary.

¶2. (S) During the Ambassador's farewell call on MFA Under Secretary Abdullah Rashid Al-Nuaimi, she inquired about the UAE-Saudi border issue and a recent exchange of letters on the same issue between UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Shaykh Hamdan and the Saudi Foreign Minister. Shaykh Hamdan had mentioned the two strongly worded letters to the Ambassador in an earlier conversation. Abdullah Rashid provided some background to the dispute, saying that after the two countries had signed a border agreement in 1974, the UAE realized it had conceded more than it should have. It was a case of "force majeur," he said. In 1974, the newly federated Emirates were in a "to-be-or-not-to-be" position and badly needed Saudi recognition. He noted that the period was marked by border disputes with all neighbors and until the agreement, Saudi Arabia had refused to recognize UAE passports.

Three issues: oil, maritime rights, tri-border area

¶3. (S) While the UAE recognizes the land border between its territory and Saudi Arabia, as established by the 1974 agreement, there are three issues that it wishes to revisit with the Saudis, Abdullah Rashid said. The first issue has to do with the rights to the Zarrarah (UAE side)/Shaybah (Saudi side) oil field that lies under both sides of the UAE-Saudi border. The majority of the field is in Saudi territory. The 1974 agreement stipulates that the UAE may not drill for oil in Zarrarah. "The UAE thinks it is not fair that we cannot utilize this," Abdullah Rashid said.

¶4. (S) The second issue relates to the UAE-Saudi maritime border. Abdullah Rashid said the 1974 agreement did not clearly demarcate the border at sea. What the Emiratis are seeking is to define the maritime border in such a way that the UAE would have some contiguous waters with Qatar. "We don't want to be separated from the Qataris by a slice of Saudi waters," he said.

¶5. (S) Abdullah Rashid told the Ambassador that the third issue the UAE would like to revisit concerns the tri-border area between the UAE, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. The Saudis and Omanis have agreed to their common border, and the Saudis and Emiratis have agreed to theirs. However, these two agreements specify different points of convergence. The Emiratis would like there to be a trilateral agreement on the points of convergence. (Note: The UAE and Oman resolved their remaining border issues last fall (see reftel)).

Revisiting the 1974 agreement

¶6. (S) As far as the Saudis are concerned, the 1974 border agreement with the UAE has been implemented and there is no need for further discussion. "They say it's finished," Abdullah Rashid said, adding that the UAE is seeking agreement on the three points. "We are not asking to renegotiate," he said. He told the Ambassador that the UAE would like to resolve the remaining UAE-Saudi border issues just as it had resolved issues with Oman. Only the dispute with Iran over the islands would remain.

¶7. (S) The Ambassador asked Abdullah Rashid if he

thought the border dispute could be resolved by Hbz and Prince Saud, or would it have to be raised at the level of Crown Prince Abdullah. Abdullah Rashid expected it would require attention at a higher level. "We don't want to make it a problem," he said. "It's a process."

Comment:

¶8. (S) If the UAE insists on revisiting its 1974 border agreement with the Saudis, it will have to significantly ratchet up its diplomatic activity to do so, by raising the issue with Crown Prince Abdullah. We expect that obtaining Saudi agreement to UAE drilling on the Zarrarah oil field will be an uphill battle.

WAHBA